United Nations S/2012/679

Security Council

Distr.: General
31 August 2012

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1886 (2009), 1941 (2010) and 2005 (2011), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit a report every six months on the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL). The report covers the period from 1 March to 31 August 2012.

II. Major developments

2. During the reporting period, the presidential, parliamentary and local council elections, scheduled to be held on 17 November 2012, continued to be the main focus of political activities in Sierra Leone. In a spirit of constructive dialogue and national ownership of the political process, the country's major stakeholders, including the 10 registered political parties, signed a "Declaration on the 2012 elections" on 18 May 2012, committing themselves to peaceful, free and fair elections. Preparations for the elections have reached a critical final stage with the completion of the biometric voter registration exercise and the announcement by the National Electoral Commission of a timetable for the key phases of the electoral process, including the nomination of candidates and the beginning of the period of electoral campaigning.

A. Political developments

3. The overall political situation in the country has been dominated by preparations for the forthcoming elections, with political parties, particularly the ruling All People's Congress (APC) and the main opposition party, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), intensifying their electoral activities throughout the country. While no incidents of political violence were reported during the period under review, the relationship between the ruling party and the major opposition party has continued to be characterized by mutual mistrust and intense rivalry. The Political Parties Registration Commission has so far authorized 10 political parties to contest the elections.

12-47514 (E) 060912

Please recycle

4. On 23 March, the Government released a white paper on the report of the Shears-Moses Commission of Inquiry, which had investigated incidents of political violence that occurred in Freetown, Bo and Kenema in March 2009. The Government accepted a number of recommendations made by the Commission, including the need to encourage political tolerance in educational institutions and to ensure the application of principles of impartiality in the country's security-sector agencies. It also agreed with the Commission's recommendation that the Independent Media Commission improve its monitoring procedures. However, the Government has yet to take steps to comply with the Commission's recommendation that the public officials who were implicated in the violence be banned from holding office.

5. The Government has also taken initial steps towards the establishment of an independent police complaints committee, as agreed upon by the ruling party and the major opposition parties in a joint communiqué signed on 2 April 2009. However, efforts need to be accelerated to finalize the development of the terms of reference and draft legislation governing the complaints mechanism.

6. Following the expression of concern by various stakeholders, including SLPP, over the Government's purchase of heavy weapons for the Sierra Leone Police, on 3 April the Government transferred those weapons to the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) to be used for military operations, both domestically and in international peace operations.

7. During the reporting period, the criminal prosecution of APC and SLPP members charged with offences related to the political violence in Bo and Kono in September 2011 continued. Also, on 21 May 2012, two members of SLPP were convicted by the High Court in Freetown for public order offences committed during a local council election in Freetown in January 2012. They were each sentenced to a five-year jail term or alternatively to pay a fine of 25 million leones.

8. On 18 May, a national conference focusing on the need for political tolerance and the peaceful conduct of the November 2012 elections was jointly organized by the Political Parties Registration Commission and UNIPSIL, with the support of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund. The conference was attended by the senior leadership of the 10 registered political parties, as well as by representatives of the Sierra Leone Police, the National Electoral Commission, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, the Guild of Editors, the National Human Rights Commission, paramount chiefs and traditional authorities, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation, the National Commission for Democracy, and women's and youth groups. At the conclusion of the conference, participants adopted a declaration underscoring their willingness to discharge their responsibilities effectively in the 2012 elections and reaffirmed their commitment to political tolerance and non-violence. Under the auspices of the Political Parties Registration Commission, a follow-up mechanism was created to ensure the implementation of the declaration. Meanwhile, the National Commission for Democracy continues to disseminate the declaration at the regional level.

9. On 23 May, a Security Council mission, led jointly by the Permanent Representatives of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of South Africa, visited Freetown. The main objectives of the mission were to assess the progress achieved by the national authorities and the people of Sierra Leone in the peacebuilding process, and to become acquainted with the preparations for the

2012 elections. The delegation met with the President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, who gave assurances that the 2012 elections would be held in a free, fair and peaceful environment. The delegation also met with representatives of various political parties, who pledged their commitment to the peaceful conduct of the elections. The Council delegation was briefed by the senior leadership of the security-sector agencies, the National Electoral Commission, the Political Parties Registration Commission and the Independent Media Commission on preparations for the elections and on the readiness of the various national institutions to discharge their responsibilities to ensure successful elections.

10. The Sierra Leone Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission organized a meeting on 22 June in New York that was attended by the Chair of the National Electoral Commission, to discuss the status of preparations for the November elections. Briefings were delivered by my Executive Representative, the Sierra Leone Inspector General of Police, a representative of the Political Parties Registration Commission, and other senior Government officials. The Peacebuilding Commission commended the various actors on the ongoing technical preparations and on their efforts towards the prevention and management of election-related violence. It also reiterated its call to national actors, particularly political parties, to do their utmost to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections.

Preparations for the 2012 elections

1. Voter registration and other processes

11. The data capture phase of biometric registration was successfully concluded on 26 March. This was followed by the consolidation of data; deduplication analysis; the printing of voter cards; the production and display of the provisional voter register and the distribution of voter cards.

12. The provisional voter register was displayed in all 2,998 voter registration and registration exhibition centres from 30 June to 16 July. During the period from 30 June to 4 July, registered voters were able to check their details on the register and collect their voter cards. On 19 and 20 July, the National Electoral Commission conducted an inquiry into cases of objection, rejection and inclusion in relation to the voter register. In accordance with the electoral laws, the Commission included and reregistered approximately 106,000 individuals on the register. It also made 33,000 corrections to the details of those already registered. As of 30 July, 2,425,027 of the 2,663,746 provisionally registered voters had received their voter cards and the Commission has made arrangements for the distribution of the remaining cards.

13. The National Electoral Commission has also taken steps to address cases of multiple voter registrations, which resulted in 794 cases being referred to the police for further action, of which 70 persons were charged. Criminal prosecutions were also launched by the police against minors suspected of attempting to register during the data capture phase of the biometric registration exercise. Following the arrest of these minors, the National Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone expressed concern over the police handling of these cases and urged the authorities to respect and protect the rights of children. It also called on all political actors to refrain from manipulating children to register to vote in the elections for their own political gain.

14. Meanwhile, the National Electoral Commission, in particular through its Political Parties Liaison Committee, continued to engage with political parties, including SLPP, in order to increase the confidence of key stakeholders in the electoral process. In an effort to ensure transparency and credibility throughout the electoral process, the National Electoral Commission allowed political party representatives to observe both the deduplication phase in regard to data captured during voter registration and the Commission's administrative inquiry into cases in which objections had been lodged following the display of the provisional voter register, which identified cases of fraudulent registration revealed during the deduplication analysis of data captured in the registration process.

15. On 30 July, the National Electoral Commission announced increases in the candidate nomination fees for the November 2012 elections, which, however, were widely criticized by almost all the political parties. The increases, which will only be confirmed following parliamentary approval, required presidential candidates to pay 100 million leones, compared to 1 million leones in the 2007 elections; parliamentary aspirants, including ordinary and paramount chieftaincy candidates, to pay 25 million leones, compared to 100,000 leones in the 2007 elections; and local council chairs and mayoral candidates to pay 5 million leones. The National Electoral Commission justified the increase on a number of grounds, including the high cost of the elections. Nevertheless, civil society organizations objected to the proposed increases, stressing that they were too high and would adversely impact the participation of youth and women, as well as persons with disabilities in the electoral process. The National Human Rights Commission characterized the increases as disproportionate and inconsistent with several international human rights instruments to which Sierra Leone is a party. SLPP and several other political parties alleged that they would only benefit the ruling party and on 3 August issued a joint communiqué calling on Parliament to reject the National Electoral Commission's proposal and maintain the existing nomination fees.

16. The ruling APC did not sign the communiqué, while the United Democratic Movement agreed to the communiqué, but limited its objection to the increase in nomination fees prescribed for parliamentary and local council candidates. In response to those developments, the Commission consulted further with the political parties and issued a press release on 10 August announcing a reduction in the nomination fees for parliamentary candidates, including ordinary and paramount chieftaincy candidates, from 25 million to 10 million leones, and in local councillors' fees from 2 million to 1 million leones. However, the fees for presidential candidates remained unchanged. On 13 August, during a meeting with my Executive Representative, SLPP and five other political parties reiterated their objections to the revised fees and questioned the neutrality of the National Electoral Commission. They cited concerns that the new fees would not create a level playing field for the coming elections and that they would have insufficient time to raise funds. My Executive Representative encouraged the parties to utilize the democratic processes and work closely with the Political Parties Registration Commission to resolve the issue. In the meantime, on 10 August, the National Electoral Commission released the timetable for the submission of approved political party candidates.

2. [illegible]ute resolution mechanisms

17. On 19 July, the Chief Justice of Sierra Leone inaugurated the Electoral Offences Courts, an important dispute resolution mechanism for the elections. There will be six such courts: three in Freetown and one in each of the regional headquarter towns of Makeni, Bo and Kenema. On 3 and 4 August, UNIPSIL and the Government of Sierra Leone conducted training for judges, prosecutors, police investigators and other paralegal staff.

3. Electoral legislation

18. During the reporting period, President Koroma assented to the Public Elections Law, which consolidates all electoral legislation into a single text. Prior to its passage in Parliament on 1 May, SLPP had raised a motion that the draft bill be submitted to a parliamentary committee for further scrutiny. However, that motion was defeated. On 25 May, the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone refused an application made by SLPP for an extension of time to serve a notice of appeal against the High Court judgement that affirmed the results of the 2007 presidential elections.

4. Election security

19. The implementation of the Integrated Security-Sector Strategy for the 2012 elections, which was developed with the support of UNIPSIL, continued during the reporting period. With assistance from the Elections Basket Fund, 10,500 general duty police and 2,224 personnel of the Operations Support Division of the Sierra Leone Police have been trained on election-specific issues and public order management, with technical support provided by UNIPSIL. Moreover, communication equipment and vehicles for the security of the elections have been procured and mitigation measures have been put in place to address security threats identified by the security-sector agencies. In addition, the Government has committed an estimated US$ 4 million to the security sector for the elections.

5. Election Steering Committee

20. The Election Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), met in April and June. During those meetings, the Committee, which is comprised of electoral management bodies, security-sector agencies, the National Election Watch — a coalition of civil society organizations — and international development partners, emphasized the need for robust and sustained voter information and education programmes, as well as careful budgetary planning by the National Electoral Commission.

6. Support to civil society and non-State actors

21. Supported by UNIPSIL through the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, the Political Parties Registration Commission, the National Commission for Democracy, the Independent Media Commission and civil society organizations have continued to implement projects aimed at promoting political participation, political tolerance, non-violence and national cohesion among non-State actors. As part of those projects, intra-party retreats for senior party executives of APC and the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) were held in April and May on the theme of strengthening democracy and political tolerance. Training on conflict

resolution was conducted by civil society organizations for the National Council of Paramount Chiefs and the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone. The National Commission for Democracy carried out sensitization programmes in the country's 112 parliamentary constituencies, conveying messages of tolerance and the need for increased female participation in the political process. In addition, higher education institutions engaged students and politicians on issues of regionalism and national cohesion. In line with the recommendations of the Shears-Moses Commission of Inquiry, peace clubs were formed in 20 secondary schools in Freetown to encourage issue-oriented politics and non-violence, mainly targeting first-time voters. Ex-combatants also acted as messengers of peace to young people in short film sketches produced by UNIPSIL in April. Further engagement with young people has continued through peace messages from presidential candidates, which are being given prominence by popular music artists in the country.

B. Security developments

22. The overall security situation remained calm. On 25 July, Parliament ratified the appointment by President Koroma of Major-General Samuel Williams as Chief of Defence Staff of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. He replaced Major-General Robert Koroma, who retired on medical grounds.

23. The Arms and Ammunition Bill 2012, which was passed during the period under review, is awaiting the assent of President Koroma. The Bill provides a framework for the regulation of gun ownership in the country and for ensuring that Sierra Leone complies with its commitments under Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) conventions to regulate the use of small arms. It also makes provisions for the destruction of arms, which will facilitate the destruction of arms collected under the UNDP arms for development programme that was completed in 2005.

24. In the reporting period, the Government appointed coroners to investigate the circumstances that had resulted in the death of six persons in separate incidents involving the use of live ammunition by the Sierra Leone Police. On 16 April, during a strike by workers in Bumbuna, Tonkolili district, one woman was killed and several other persons were injured during attempts by the police to contain the ensuing disturbances. Two youths were shot dead by the police in Freetown on 5 June. A bike rider died on 15 June after an encounter with the police in the Goderich area of Freetown. Four youths suffered gunshot wounds in central Freetown on 9 July while the police were making arrests. In order to ensure that such incidents do not create challenges for the management of the elections, the Sierra Leone Police, with support from the United Nations, commenced a review of its Rules of Engagement in parallel with the development of a strategy on governance mechanisms in the force.

C. Economic and social developments and activities of the United Nations country team

25. The Sierra Leone economy continued to expand, with the prospects for 2012 and the medium term remaining favourable to the emergence of new economic opportunities. Real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 6 per cent in 2011,

partially as a result of increased agricultural production, mining and services. Additionally, economic growth was projected to make a one-time jump to 33 per cent in 2012, mainly on account of increased iron ore production, and will average 6 per cent in the period from 2013 to 2015. In the meantime, consumer price inflation continued to moderate as the leone stabilized and food inflation slackened. Inflation has declined from 16.9 per cent at the end of December 2011 to 14.1 per cent at the end of June 2012. It is likely that this downward trend will continue in the second half of 2012, with the exception of the anticipated risk of higher food prices at the peak of the rainy season.

26. Notwithstanding the challenges for fiscal performance in 2011, there was some improvement in the first half of 2012, during which budget execution was consistent with the Extended Credit Facility programme. As a result, with the exception of outstanding commitments, the challenges to fiscal execution in 2012 have been minimized. Domestic borrowing has also been contained within the programme target and the treasury bill rate has stabilized at between 23 and 28 per cent.

27. The overall current account deficit deteriorated to 50.6 per cent of GDP in 2011 on account of large imports of machinery for iron ore projects. However, it is projected to improve significantly to around 15 per cent of GDP in 2012 with an increase in iron ore exports. The external debt position remained at a reassuring debt-to-GDP ratio of 30 per cent at the end of 2011, while gross international reserves are projected to reach US$ 410 million.

28. The significant expansion of the extractive industries is expected to sustain increased economic growth and generate significant Government revenue in the medium to long term. However, policies need to be developed to help generate employment opportunities for the growing population. In addition, diversification of growth sources is necessary, as well as an improvement of the business environment for the private sector. It will also be important for the Government to put in place a well-targeted social safety net that supports vulnerable households. Deepening the democratic process, including through credible elections, would help achieve sustainable longer-term and inclusive economic growth.

29. On 16 August, the Government of Sierra Leone stated that a presidential task force had been established to deal with the cholera outbreak in the country, which was gravitating towards an epidemic. As of 19 August, 216 persons had died from cholera and since January 2012, 11,654 cases of cholera had been reported. In the interim, emergency financial assistance was obtained from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to assist in combating the outbreak. The Government, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society and civil society continued efforts aimed at cholera surveillance and medical treatment, water chlorination and the provision of safe drinking water. They are also promoting proper hygienic practices through the local media channels. In addition to supporting the response efforts of the Government in regard to the cholera outbreak, WHO assisted the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in planning, monitoring and implementing supplementary immunization campaigns for children under 5 with the objective of reducing infant mortality and morbidity. WHO also supported the Ministry in carrying out district- and central-level performance reviews, as well as in formulating a policy and strategic plan that focus on human resource needs in the

health sector. In July, the Minister of Health and Sanitation launched blood transfusion centres equipped by WHO in Kenema and Bo.

30. Efforts to strengthen the delivery of essential medical supplies have continued under the Government's free health-care initiative. Moreover, UNICEF and other partners have supported the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in forecasting requirements for purchasing and distributing essential medical supplies. Further progress was made in the area of the procurement of medical supplies through the passage of a parliamentary act which establishes an autonomous National Pharmaceutical Procurement Unit. The country's development partners have been supporting efforts to build up the capacity of such national institutions.

31. Ensuring access to justice and assistance for victims of conflict is integral to the peace consolidation process and a precondition for preventing future conflict. In that regard, on 25 June, the National Commission for Social Action, with assistance from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and technical support from the International Organization for Migration, commenced a new round of cash payments to the remaining victims of the civil war who have yet to receive any reparations for gross human rights violations suffered during the conflict.

32. Further to its invocation in June 2012 of the "ceased circumstances" clause of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees with reference to Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began making arrangements for the voluntary repatriation of 800 Liberians to their country of origin.

III. Advancing peacebuilding

33. The second joint progress report on the implementation of the Agenda for Change, which was prepared by the Government of Sierra Leone in consultation with international partners, was published in August. The report focuses on the status of implementation of the Agenda for Change and outstanding targets and remaining challenges. The report will be discussed by the Peacebuilding Commission in September and will form the basis of the Commission's engagement with Sierra Leone over the coming months.

34. Preparations for the Agenda for Prosperity, the successor programme to the Agenda for Change, have already started. The Government has prepared the outline of the new programme, which envisages the following eight pillars: (i) economic diversification to promote inclusive growth; (ii) managing mineral resources; (iii) accelerating progress on the Millennium Development Goals for human development; (iv) international competitiveness; (v) employment and labour strategy; (vi) social protection; (vii) governance and public sector reforms; and (viii) gender. There will also be a chapter on cross-cutting issues, including environment and climate change, financing, monitoring and evaluation, the results framework and the poverty profile. In addition, the Government has established a technical team to coordinate this process with UNDP, representing the international development partners. Pillar working groups, with representation from United Nations agencies and programmes, are also in place to deliberate on development strategies and policies relating to the pillar thematic areas, as well as cross-cutting issues. The development strategies and an accompanying policy document are expected to be completed shortly.

IV. Main risks for the consolidation of peace

A. Transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking

35. The risk of illicit drug trafficking remains, although there has not been any major interdiction since the seizure of a planeload of over 700 kilograms of illicit drugs in July 2008. UNIPSIL, jointly with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), continued to provide support to the Sierra Leone Transnational Organized Crime Unit in combating illegal drug trafficking, within the framework of the West Africa Coast Initiative. During the reporting period, two vehicles and one patrol boat were donated to the Unit by UNODC.

36. In the period under review, a large quantity of *cannabis sativa* in Kambia district in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone, was destroyed by the Transnational Organized Crime Unit with the support of the Government of Ireland. Meanwhile, discussions were under way to hasten the release of funds from international partners for the continuation of the Unit's operations. Funding is required for the construction of premises for the Unit and for the provision of support to the RSLAF Maritime Wing to assist it in its efforts to reduce illegal activities in the territorial waters of Sierra Leone. The Unit is currently investigating a case of human trafficking, which allegedly involved the smuggling of some 50 Sierra Leoneans out of the country, between April and May, on board a trawler that was apprehended by the Guinean authorities.

37. In May, UNODC, with the support of UNIPSIL, undertook an assessment of the criminal justice system, including prisons, in the framework of the West Africa Coast Initiative. The main objectives were to assess the needs of the system and support the Transnational Organized Crime Unit with the prosecution of criminal cases and in ensuring international cooperation concerning criminal matters. In this regard, a number of recommendations were formulated, inter alia, encouraging Sierra Leone to ratify the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, to enact legislation to criminalize organized crime in line with the Convention, and to improve prison overcrowding and management.

38. In June, UNODC commenced an assessment of drug demand in Sierra Leone under its global project entitled "Treating drug dependence and its health consequences". The assessment is expected to be completed in August and will enable the adoption of appropriate action and intervention for drug prevention, treatment and care, as well as supporting the development of rapid national responses. On 26 June, UNIPSIL, in collaboration with UNODC, commemorated the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking by advocating for a halt in drug-related violence, including during the 2012 election.

B. Youth

39. To address the challenges posed by unemployment among young people, as well as to harness the potential of Sierra Leonean youth, the Government, in addition to establishing the National Youth Commission, created a new Ministry of Youth, Employment and Sports. As requested in the Act establishing the Commission, an annual report on the situation of the youth of the country has been submitted to relevant stakeholders for validation. The report, which was prepared

with technical and financial assistance from UNDP, addresses a range of issues, including youth in governance, and will form the basis for policy formulation on youth matters.

40. Other efforts to address the challenge of youth unemployment were undertaken in the reporting period. Five business support centres, managed by the National Youth Commission and financed by UNDP, began operations in July 2012. It is expected that they will provide assistance to at least 2,000 young people to establish and grow their businesses. A graduate internship programme was also launched in the period under review and will help 150 young people bolster their employment credentials through the acquisition of valuable and monitored work experience in selected institutions. In the meantime, UNDP continued the financing of career advisory and placement centres that provide job search assistance and soft skills training to at least 5,000 young people per year. Three additional centres will be opened by the end of 2012.

C. Corruption

41. In the reporting period, the Anti-Corruption Commission continued its three-pronged approach to combating corruption based on prevention, investigation and prosecution. Through its outreach activities, the Commission noted that weak service delivery of Government departments, ministries and agencies has contributed to corrupt practices. On 7 August, the Commission reported that 552 billion leones had been recovered from corrupt individuals and corporate entities in the first six months of 2012. Regarding prosecutions by the Commission, as of 26 July, 17 cases had been submitted to the High Court in Freetown and eight to the Court of Appeal. On 10 August, the High Court convicted the Mayor of Freetown, from the ruling party, for corruption and a breach of procurement regulations. The Mayor was sentenced to a three-year prison sentence or alternatively a fine of 170 million leones. During the first session of the Implementation Review Group convened under the United Nations Convention against Corruption, Sierra Leone was selected to be reviewed for compliance with the Convention.

V. Support to democratic institutions

A. National Electoral Commission

42. The National Electoral Commission continued to play a lead role in the preparation and management of the forthcoming elections in Sierra Leone. The Commission also continued to receive technical and financial support from the UNDP-managed Elections Basket Fund, which enabled the establishment of a central data centre in Freetown. In addition, regional results and tallying centres will be established in Makeni, Bo, Kenema and Freetown in October. Finally, capacity development of staff was also undertaken, including through a BRIDGE training programme on election security.

B. Political Parties Registration Commission

43. The former Chair of the Political Parties Registration Commission, Justice Samuel Ademusu, died in April 2012 and Justice Tolla Thompson, was appointed by President Koroma as his replacement. The appointment was approved by Parliament on 9 August. The Commission continued, with the support of UNIPSIL, to discharge its mandate of promoting inter-party dialogue, including through the implementation of the declaration on the 2012 elections signed on 18 May by the major elections stakeholders in Sierra Leone. The Commission also continued to implement programmes supporting the activities of the All Political Party Youth Association and the All Political Women's Association and the efforts of the District Code of Conduct Monitoring Committees to promote conflict resolution as well as political tolerance and non-violence. During the period under review, the Commission mediated disputes between political parties and monitored the conduct of the voter registration process. Parliament has yet to approve a bill granting authority to the Commission to penalize political parties for any infraction of the Political Parties' Code of Conduct.

C. Independent Media Commission

44. The Sierra Leone media should play an indispensable role in contributing to peaceful elections through accurate and balanced reporting that avoids exploiting ethnic or other divisions in the country. While concerns remain with regard to regulating the conduct of the media, the Independent Media Commission issued, in July, a media code of practice, as part of the authority granted to it under the Independent Media Commission Act of 2000. The new code of practice was validated by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, as well as several other media organizations, which signed the code as a demonstration of their commitment. Additionally, media monitoring mechanisms were set in place, including through the procurement of electronic media software to assist in tracking radio stations, and the issuance of the IMC magazine entitled *Media Watch*. The Commission continued to examine ways of ensuring political neutrality on the part of media practitioners. In the same vein, the Guild of Editors was enhancing professional standards through a peer review of some Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation radio programmes.

D. Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation

45. The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation is also expected to play a vital role in advancing political pluralism by ensuring that it provides all political parties with equitable broadcasting access, particularly during the forthcoming elections. In the reporting period, with financial support from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and with technical advice provided by UNIPSIL, the Corporation issued draft elections guidelines that were formally adopted on 9 August by political parties. The Corporation has also expressed its commitment to establishing an elections unit.

46. UNDP and UNIPSIL engaged with the Corporation on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Presidential Task Force, as well as on external audits focused on improving the administration of the Corporation. During the reporting period, there was an improvement in the revenue collection and financial

management of the Corporation, as well as in news production and management. The Corporation has also reactivated its regional stations. Nevertheless, challenges remain for the formulation and implementation of a well-articulated business strategy that guarantees steady revenue to the Corporation and thus secures its independence. The United Nations continued to assist it in this area and in promoting the Corporation's adherence to media best practices in the subregion as part of a South-South approach.

E. Parliament

47. With assistance from international development partners, including the United Nations, progress has been made towards improving the capacity of Parliament through the provision of support to the Parliamentary Assistance Coordination Office. Additionally, the *Hansard* Section has been provided with transcription and docking equipment to enable it to document parliamentary proceedings, while consultants and trainers have been recruited to train staff of the various departments of the Parliamentary Service. They included a dedicated Technical Advisor to Parliament for capacity-building and resource mobilization. Parliament has assessed its strategic plan for the period from 2009 to 2013, and has presented a draft outline programme of support to potential donors. In the reporting period, Parliament approved the Public Elections Act.

F. Decentralization

48. On 6 June, the European Union announced that it would co-finance with the World Bank the second phase of the decentralized service delivery programme, the cost of which is estimated at US$ 32 million. The programme, which will continue until December 2015, is aimed at strengthening the capacity of central and local government to manage decentralized services and improve the availability of central government funding to the councils. On 10 July, the Vice-President, Samuel Sam-Sumana, launched the local economic development programme, which is part of the Government's decentralization policy. Its objective is to assist the economic development of local governments through partnerships with the private sector, as well as with civil society and community-based organizations.

VI. Human rights and the rule of law

A. National Human Rights Commission

49. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) began public hearings in July into an incident in Bumbuna, Tonkolili district, in which one person was killed by the police in April during a strike by workers of the African Minerals company. The Commission will determine if any human rights violations occurred, including the use of excessive force by the police. The hearings are the second exercise of the Commission's quasi-judicial capacity. The first public hearing took place in 2011 to consider the case of ex-RSLAF personnel who challenged their discharge on the grounds of mental imbalance that had resulted in a reduction in their separation entitlements. The Commission found in their favour and ordered the Government to pay their full benefits.

50. On 30 and 31 May, the Human Rights Commission organized a National Consultative Conference on Human Rights and Elections, on the theme "Making human rights real in the 2012 elections". Over 200 participants and key stakeholders, including political party representatives, attended the conference, which concluded with the adoption of a resolution highlighting the freedoms of opinion, expression, assembly, association and movement, and other human rights. On 24 July, Parliament ratified the appointment of three members of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone nominated by President Koroma to replace three former commissioners whose tenure had expired in December 2011. The vacancies for the position had been advertised in the national media and civil society representatives had had an opportunity to provide input to the selection process.

B. Rights of persons with disabilities

51. Sierra Leone has taken important steps towards ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010 and enacting the Disability Act in 2011, which was followed by the development of a road map for the creation of a national commission on persons with disabilities in 2012. Additionally, on 15 June, President Koroma appointed the Chairman of the Commission on the basis of nominations provided by all ministries and organizations dealing with disabled persons.

52. On 7 June, the Freedom of Information Bill, which was one of the recommendations made during the 2011 universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council, was submitted to Parliament by the Minister of Information and Communications. The bill is aimed at promoting transparency, accountability and good governance. However, some parliamentarians have raised concerns about the absence of appropriate structures needed for the bill's implementation.

C. International treaty reporting

53. The Government of Sierra Leone, with the support of UNIPSIL, submitted its first report on implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Draft reports on the country's compliance with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment of Punishment and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights are under review by the Attorney General.

D. Technical cooperation and capacity-building

54. Pursuant to the Mission's mandate to build national capacity for the protection and promotion of human rights, several activities were undertaken in the reporting period, including supporting the Government in the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the universal periodic review process. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, with the support of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, continued providing assistance to the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone.

55. UNIPSIL supported the third National Consultative Conference of District Human Rights Committees in Kenema, which covered election monitoring. It also supported radio broadcasts in the northern and eastern regions of the country to raise awareness of the rights of disabled persons. Additionally, it conducted several human rights training programmes for prison and police officers, as well as civil society organizations and traditional leaders, on the administration of justice and the rule of law; economic, social and cultural rights; political participation by persons with disabilities; and sexual and gender-based violence.

VII. Gender issues

56. During the reporting period, the United Nations continued its collaboration with the Government and other stakeholders on women's empowerment and the achievement of the 30 per cent quota for women's participation. The efforts of the United Nations were also focused on the implementation of the National Gender Strategic Plan and the Sierra Leone National Action Plan, which are based on Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). To that end, assistance was provided for the establishment of a technical committee of the "M30 Task Force", a coalition of civil society organizations, to ensure strategic support for the draft gender equality bill. The bill has undergone a critical review by the committee and is expected to be submitted shortly for printing, prior to the commencement of the pre-legislative process. The United Nations has also provided support to the sensitization and advocacy initiatives of civil society organizations and parliamentary groups on the proposed bill.

57. Working with the All Political Parties Women's Association, the Council of Women Councillors and other groups, the United Nations has supported the identification and putting forward of female electoral candidates and the building of their capacity. The All Political Parties Women's Association, which is also a forum for conflict resolution and mitigation, conducted its convention for national delegates from 15 to 17 July. During the reporting period, the United Nations and its partners conducted two training programmes on media coverage for female electoral candidates, which were attended by over 70 participants.

VIII. Special Court for Sierra Leone

58. On 26 April, the Special Court for Sierra Leone sitting at The Hague convicted the former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, of crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law committed in Sierra Leone from 30 November 1996 to 18 January 2002. The judgement was welcomed in Sierra Leone, where the court proceedings were transmitted via video link to Freetown and broadcast on local radio stations to enable the victims and the public to follow the trial. At a hearing on 30 May, Mr. Taylor was sentenced to 50 years' imprisonment. However, on 18 June, the Defence indicated that it would appeal the judgement. As a result, a revised Special Court of Sierra Leone completion strategy was issued, projecting the delivery of an appeals judgement in the Taylor case in September 2013. Meanwhile, the Court is hearing three contempt of court cases arising from attempts to interfere with witnesses in the Taylor trial. On 15 June, a guilty verdict was delivered in one of the cases, while the other two cases remain pending.

IX. Regional cooperation

59. In the reporting period, Sierra Leone continued to maintain good relationships with its neighbours, including through the Manu River Union and the Economic Community for West African States, with President Koroma attending meetings of both organizations.

60. Concerning the Yenga border issue between Guinea and Sierra Leone, President Koroma and the President of Guinea, Alpha Condé, reaffirmed, at a meeting in June, their intention to resolve the matter peacefully. In a joint declaration signed by the two Governments in Freetown on 27 July, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to demilitarizing the Yenga border area and to ensuring that their respective armed forces implemented the joint declaration. On 16 August, the Government announced that the Yenga border area had been demilitarized and reiterated its strong support for the Joint Technical Committee established by both countries to ensure a final resolution of the dispute.

61. Further to those developments, and with assistance from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, UNIPSIL and the Manu River Union Secretariat have commenced discussions on possible projects and activities to be undertaken in the border areas of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The main objective of the projects will be to strengthen linkages and peaceful coexistence among communities in the border areas and to address common cross-border challenges. A conference of the electoral management bodies of the four Manu River Union member States, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone is scheduled to take place in Freetown in mid-September for the exchange of experience and best practices in the management of elections.

X. Observations and recommendations

62. Sierra Leone has continued to make significant progress in consolidating its hard-won peace and building democratic foundations. Nonetheless, a number of challenges remain and concerted efforts need to continue in order to tackle issues identified by the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These include: addressing unemployment, in particular among young people; consolidating and strengthening the country's democratic institutions; promoting national reconciliation and national cohesion and a culture of political tolerance among the country's political actors; managing the exploitation of the nation's natural resources, including newly found vast mineral riches, for the benefit of the country and its people; and combating corruption. In addition, addressing the threats posed by transnational organized crime, such as illicit drug trafficking, will remain an important priority for the country. As focus shifts towards the elections, continuing attention also needs to be given to ensuring that the post-election period will be peaceful, as well as tackling effectively the root causes of the conflict, which if left unaddressed will have the potential to reverse the important gains the country has made in the past decade.

63. Progress in the exploitation of the country's mineral resources, including potentially commercially viable oil reserves, and its proper management would help to improve the Government's finances and enable it to sustain the requisite level of economic growth to address its socioeconomic challenges. However, in the short to

medium term, the assistance of the country's international partners will continue to be required to address the remaining key challenges as Sierra Leone transitions from a post-conflict to a development phase. In particular, resources will be required from international partners for the full implementation of the Government's planned Agenda for Prosperity, as well as other major national economic programmes. The work of the Anti-Corruption Commission in combating corruption will also continue to be crucial for promoting the confidence of the citizenry in governance.

64. The main political development in the coming months will be the November 2012 presidential, parliamentary and local council elections. The elections, the third since the end of the conflict, will be an important determinant of how much progress has been made in consolidating peace in the country. Of the utmost importance is the need to ensure that the elections are conducted peacefully, without recourse to political violence. I commend the stakeholders in Sierra Leone, including the country's political parties, for the commitments they have made in signing the Declaration of 18 May 2012, and call upon them to adhere to those commitments as they enter the crucial phases of the electoral process.

65. I welcome the release by the Government of the white paper on the Shears Moses Commission of Inquiry and have taken note of the ongoing prosecution of political party supporters implicated in acts of political violence, which will assist in deterring such activities. I encourage the Government to continue to expedite efforts aimed at establishing an independent police complaints committee and at implementing other recommendations of the white paper. I reiterate my call to the political parties to take national ownership of the political process and to set aside their differences in the larger national interest of ensuring that the elections are conducted peacefully.

66. The success of those elections and the country's continued progress towards achieving the aspirations of its people can only be realized if all Sierra Leoneans work together, respecting the rule of law and the country's Constitution in a peaceful political process. The discharge of their respective duties by the democratic institutions of Sierra Leone will give the elections credibility and legitimacy. I encourage the Sierra Leonean security agencies, which have the primary responsibility for maintaining law and order during the elections, to exercise their responsibilities in a professional and impartial manner.

67. In the same vein, other national stakeholders, including the political parties, civil society and, indeed, individual citizens have the duty to act within the limits of the law, and to work with the law enforcement agencies to create a peaceful environment for the elections. The Political Parties Registration Commission has a key responsibility for furthering dialogue with the political parties. In this context, I urge the Commission to work towards securing the full adherence of all the political parties to the Declaration of 18 May 2012. I also call on Parliament to enact the legislation for the reform of the Political Parties Registration Commission, which includes giving the Code of Conduct the necessary legal authority, thus improving the Commission's oversight of the political parties.

68. I welcome the ongoing arrangements for the elections and encourage the National Electoral Commission to continue to engage in constructive dialogue with national stakeholders, particularly through the Political Parties Liaison Committee, as a forum for consultations and the exchange of vital information on the electoral process.

69. The media in Sierra Leone should play a constructive role to ensure the success of the elections by disseminating accurate information, educating the public and promoting dialogue. The media should refrain from spreading messages of hate, division and national discord. I urge the Independent Media Commission to play a more proactive role in discharging its regulatory functions by enforcing its Code of Media Practice. I also call on the media and professional associations in the country, in particular the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and the Guild of Editors, to cooperate with the Independent Media Commission in the discharge of its responsibilities.

70. Enhancing the participation of women in the political process in the 2012 elections is a key objective, which the United Nations fully supports. In this regard, I welcome the increased commitment of the Government of Sierra Leone to promoting gender equality, and the proactive role played by various stakeholders, including political parties and civil society groups, in ensuring the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

71. The international community has been instrumental in bringing peace to Sierra Leone and consolidating peace in the country. I therefore urge international partners to remain seized of the peacebuilding process in the country, particularly in the run-up to the November elections. The Peacebuilding Commission has a critical role to play at this stage. I wish to express my appreciation to the Sierra Leone Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, through its Chair, Ambassador Guillermo E. Rishchynski, for its strong support in furthering the consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone and for its critical engagement with national and international stakeholders in connection with the 2012 elections.

72. In view of the importance of the forthcoming elections and the need to assist the Government and key stakeholders in the electoral process, and taking into account critical tasks to be accomplished after the elections, including the provision of support for the resolution of any post-election concerns, facilitating the smooth transition into office of any newly elected Government, supporting efforts aimed at building national cohesion and reconciliation, and enabling the preparation of a transition plan and an exit strategy for UNIPSIL, I recommend a renewal of the mission's mandate for a further eight to nine months, during which period I intend to dispatch a United Nations inter-agency technical assessment mission to Sierra Leone to conduct a review of progress made in the implementation of the Mission's mandate and to advise me in that regard.

73. I wish to thank President Koroma and his Government for their continued cooperation with the United Nations. I am also grateful to the international development partners of Sierra Leone for their generous support of the country's peacebuilding process. Finally, I thank my Executive Representative, Jens Toyberg-Frandzen, and the staff of UNIPSIL, the United Nations agencies and programmes, as well as other international partners for their continued collaboration with UNIPSIL in the discharge of its mandate.